

England. — Churches. *et* ¹²⁵ — Baptists. — *Midland*
Assoc.

The CIRCULAR LETTER.

The ELDERS and MESSENGERS of the several BAPTIST CHURCHES,

Meeting at *Astle* *Astle*, Bengworth, Birmingham, Bourton, Brit-
telande, Cirencester, Dudley, Hooknorton, Middleton, Per-
shore, Tewkesbury, and Warwick, (having received Letters
from Bramsgrove, Bewdley, Leamington, Upton, and Wor-
cester) met in ASSOCIATION, at WARWICK, JUNE the
9th and 10th, 1778; holding the Doctrines of Three
equal Persons in the Union of the glorious Godhead; eternal
and personal Election; original Sin; particular Redemption;
free Justification, by the Righteousness of CHRIST imputed;
efficacious Grace in Regeneration; and the final Perseverance
of the Saints;

To the several CHURCHES they represent, send Christian Salu-
tation; wishing Grace, Mercy, and Peace, from God our
Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ,

Dearly beloved Friends and Brethren!

THE time for our annual Convention, as your Messengers
and Representatives, is come; as is also the time to com-
pile and transmit to you another affectionate Epistle: and we
trust, none of us have been wanting in our warmest addresses at
the Throne of God, that the one may be blessed to us, and the
other to you. Permit us then to remind you, that a possession
of the Grace of Jesus, and a profession of his Name and Truth,
are the highest and noblest ornaments of our nature and charac-
ter. What we wish to have principally in our view then, is, to
promote, as much as may be, the inward Power of Religion
amongst us all. If this prospers, we are well satisfied every
thing else will prosper. Then love, and peace, and patience,
pleasure and happiness, will abound:—The House of God will
be frequented, and prayer meetings duly attended; the Bible
often read, family and closet worship regarded. Sin will be
loathsome, and *needless* converse with sinners left and forsaken.
The sabbath will be a delight, and the holy of the Lord ho-
norable. The heart will be warm, faith active, and the frame
lively. Christians will often cry, "Come and hear all ye that
fear God, and we will declare what he hath done for our souls."

Serious, sensible converse, about soul affairs and eternal things,
is not only the delight of Christians, but a very pleasing proof
of

of the inward power of Religion, and a growing experience; and in short, Sirs, there is nothing the Christian should so much wish for and follow after.—When we read the Word of God, and see therein accounts of eminently, godly and pious men, how should it stimulate and stir us up to wish we were like them; or that we could, in some happy measure, imitate such fair originals.—For instance, it is said of *Enoch* and *Noah*, that they *walked with God*;—of *Abraham*, that he was the *friend of God*;—of *Moses*, that he was *faithful in the house of God*;—of *David*, that he was *a man after God's own Heart*;—of *Daniel*, that he was *greatly beloved of God*;—of *Josiah*, that *he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left*;—of *Obadiab*, that *he feared the Lord greatly*;—of *Zacharias* and his pious *Consort*, that they were both *righteous before God, walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord, blameless*;—of the *MESSIAH's* fore-runner, that he was *a burning and a shining light*;—of *Stephen*, that he was *full of faith, of power, and of the Holy Ghost*;—of *Barnabas*, that he was *a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith*.—But the time would fail us to tell of all the illustrious characters that adorn the pages of sacred History, and filled their respective places in religious society, from age to age:—remarkable for their faith and fortitude; their steadiness and humility; their patience and piety; their love to God and men; their zeal and fervor in the Cause of Jesus;—in a word, for their godliness, usefulness, holiness and obedience. In the eleventh Chapter of the *Hebrews*, we are presented with a list of some of those heroes and worthies; the perusal of which is enough to make the holiest man living blush for his sins and short comings; and to burn with holy Zeal for God and the Gospel: To make him bitterly lament that he is so very a dwarf in the knowledge of heavenly things; that he falls so far short, not only of the bright example of his Saviour and Lord, but also of multitudes of his servants.

Surely, Brethren, the times call loudly upon us, to gird our loins and trim our lamps. The appearances of things are awfully hostile. And amongst the many inquiries and out-cries, respecting “the state of the nation;” what care is there taken to inquire into the state of Religion? What are arts, arms, population, wealth, &c. without the power and practice of Religion? The great king *Alfred* used to say, “he was convinced, that the contempt of divine Worship destroys a state; and that the observance of it occasions the greatness of a people.” And a wiser Man than *Alfred* has said, “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but Sin is the reproach of any people.” There is nothing but sin that can injure us, strictly speaking. Omitting the Duties of Religion, and violating the Commands of God, will, sooner or later, bring misery, eternal misery, if not pre-

prevented by eternal mercy, on every soul of Man that doeth evil. But how blessed is that *Nation*, that *Congregation*, that *Family*, that *Person*, who fears the Lord, and delights in his Commandments! Hence we read, "that in the house of the righteous there is much treasure:"—Not indeed much worldly treasure, in many of their houses, being of the poor of this world, but *heavenly* treasure:—And what is this heavenly treasure but the *Word* of God, the *Grace* of God, the *Presence* of God, and the *Blessing* of God? This is treasure, that moth cannot eat, rust corrupt, or thief steal. Possessed of this, we can never be poor; destitute of this, we can never be rich.—We hope, dear Brethren, this heavenly treasure is found in your houses; and if so, consider your happiness, your dignity, and your duty. Remember, that Religion is not a mere name, form, or fashion: It is indeed the most blessed thing on Earth; it is the *one thing needful*! To *know* the Love of God,—to *feel* the Life of God,—and to *live* to the Glory of God, is *the real felicity and true dignity* of good Men.

These blessed Souls, we are told, "dwell in God, and God in them." That they are not under the law; that to them there is no condemnation; no charge against them, in the Court of Heaven, or the Oracles of God. "Neither tribulation, famine, fire, peril, persecution, angels, or death, shall be able to separate them from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Some, perhaps, remember the account of the good Man, in his dying moments, desiring the eighth chapter of the *Romans* might be read; and his eye-sight being almost gone, desired his finger might be put upon the words just cited, and asked; Is it on? and being told it was.—Then said, "Now God be with you, my dear children; I have breakfasted with you, and shall sup with the Lord Jesus Christ;" and so died:—Happy dying indeed! So may our beloved Brethren; and so may their Elders and Messengers die! In this life, faith one, the Glory of Heaven is but revealed to us; but, in the life to come, it shall be revealed in us. The prospect the Gospel opens to the living and the dying Christian, is very promising and pleasing; but many may know the *History* of the Gospel, who never knew the *Mystery* of it. Be careful then, Sirs, to examine your hearts, and consider whether they are right in the Sight of God. "A *sound* heart, saith *Solomon*, is the life of the flesh;" and we may add, it is the life of the Faithful.

Labor and long after Communion with God:—Learn the lesson of godly contentment; and remember, that he that deserves *nothing*, should be content with *any* thing. The World's *all*, is nothing at all. It is more worth, saith one, than all the mines in the world, to be able to say, *Christ is mine*. In this saying two capital Blessings are contained; 1st. A personal In-

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Interest in Christ; 2d. A positive Assurance of it. The first, is the common privilege of All who believe; the latter may not be so. But in this they may take comfort, that it is *Interest*; and not the *Assurance* of Interest, in which their security lies: It is better to possess an humble *Diffidence*, than a vain *Confidence*: "I do not believe every one, (said Mr. Dobb, to a doubting friend) that saith he hath grace; nor every one that saith he hath no grace." By and by, every man's work will be tried of what sort it is. We shall soon discern who they are that serve God; and who they are that serve him not. Look narrowly, dear Brethren, into your tempers and characters. Remember the awful obligations you are under, to be circumspect, humble, peaceable, patient and holy.

God has given you talents, and commands you to occupy till he comes; then shall you be called to an account; and it shall be known how much every man hath gained by trading. Let no means of getting, or doing good, escape you; no opportunity of waiting upon God be neglected by you. The eye of God, more swift than lightning, flashes through your whole conduct, and your whole souls. There is a *nota bene* taken in Heaven of every sabbath, sermon, ordinance, and prayer-meeting you neglect and omit. Yes, Sirs, there is a very strict account kept by Him who is the searcher of hearts; of all we *are*, *want*, *do*, or *think*, Ps. cxxxix. 4. Mal. iii. 16. All things are open and naked to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do; Heb. iv. 13. Consider then, dear Friends, the solemn obligations that God hath laid upon you. Your profess the doctrines of Free grace; but remember, as one saith, that "*Free grace calls aloud for Full duty*:" And adds, "*A Saint should not do good works to live, but live to do good works*. Let Christians, saith he, do their *best*, and then let the world do their worst. And, He is the best Christian (not who *talks* most of God) but he who *walks* most with God.*" Hence, we read of good Men walking with the LAMB in white, and are counted worthy. Religion is not matter of *Curiosity*, but *Choice*; not to be regarded as we please, and when we please, but as God pleases. The manner and measure of our Duty, and of every branch of our holy Religion, is marked out in the divine Word. Here we are taught the way to Happiness, and the way of Holiness. The good Man, who makes Conscience of searching his Bible and his heart; of hearing the Gospel, and of Prayer to God, is in a fair way of being both very happy; and very useful. Wicked men, to quell convictions and quench grief, fly to their companions and their cups; but a good man,

* R. Venning's Milk and Honey.

in order to obtain ease to his troubled heart, will go to his Bible and his God. While this is your practice, dear Brethren, as communities, as families, as individuals; we shall be able to entertain the most pleasing hopes of you. We wish you well as to this life, and earnestly pray your trades and commerce may prosper and flourish; at the same time, that you may so *use*, as never to *abuse*, these good things: But your *Religion*, Sirs, your *Souls* and their *Salvation*, lie nearest our hearts. For a professor to increase in worldly wealth and grandeur; and to shine in the circles of the gay and rich; and at the same time, his poor soul is declining; prayer, reading, and meditation, frequently omitted, is no pleasing consideration. How much more delightful is it, to sit with a poor good man, in the corner of his cottage, to converse with him about Jesus and Heaven; to find him with the Bible in his hands, and see him all-*alive* for God;—than to sit on the carpets of the rich, surrounded with grandeur and wealth; with scarce a possibility of getting a religious sentence out of his mouth;—though perhaps a professor and a Church member. O, dear Brethren! take care of being deceived by the shew of sense. Do not neglect opportunities of a religious nature through a mere *forged* necessity. If either *divine* things, or *carnal* things must give way; let it be the latter.

It is better to want opportunities for the improvement of our hearts; than to want hearts for the improvement of our opportunities. Don't be satisfied with *notions* and *forms* in your religion: pray that it may be powerful and practical. The *motions* of grace, says a divine, are better than the *notions* of grace. Remember that the day is coming when God will write TEKEL on every carnal man, and thing—weighed in the balances they will be found wanting. We wish you, dear Brethren, to abide firm in your principles, and to abound in every branch of your holy profession. Shew yourselves real friends to your Country, wellwishers to other Denominations, tender-hearted and charitable to the poor, free and open, generous and benevolent in all your deportment before men. Let gravity, sincerity, the fear of God and a love to the Lord Jesus Christ distinguish you, wherever you are. Cherish the most tender concern for poor sinners and mistaken professors; and let their cases lie near your hearts, when you are approaching to God. Shew tenderness to the weak and the tempted: Like your Master, “take the lambs in your arms, and carry them in your bosom.” Or like Job, “be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; deliver the poor when he crieth, the fatherless and him that hath no helper. Let the blessing of him that was ready to perish come upon you, and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy.” In all your religious conduct, exercise candour, forbearance and charity; yet let not your *charity* govern your *consciences*: Be careful that the former do not struggle for dominion with the latter, but let them go *hand* in hand. In your temper and
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affection be pitiful and courteous; but in all matters of faith and practice, steady and conscientious. Make allowances for the frailties of fallible men, while you are unshaken as rocks to the truths of God. Give plentifully of your candor and charity, to the mistaken and erroneous; of your tears and prayers; but give not away a single grain of sacred truth. "Be thou faithful unto death, saith Jesus, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Eternity is at hand, Sirs! The signs of the Son of man will soon be seen in heaven; the Judgment set, and the Books opened. The cry of, "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust," will soon be heard. The promise of the Saviour is, "Surely I come quickly,"—and the prayer of the Church is, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." "Be ye also ready," is the awful admonition of our divine Lord. And we beg leave to ask, What readiness or forwardness you discover, for the service of God below, and the Glory of God above? Are you, like *Israel* on the memorable evening of their departure from *Egypt*, standing ready with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet and your staff in your hand? Are you crying, "Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices?" Or like *Sisera's* mother, looking out at the window, crying thro' the lattice, "Why is his Chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his Chariots?" It is a great mercy to be willing to live, or ready to die. Death speaks the same language to the believer, *Martha* did to *Mary*, "The Master is come, and calleth thee;"—and he arises quickly and goes to Jesus. Watch then, dear Brethren, for ye know not when your Lord will come. Give the world convincing proofs that you are not *of it*, and that you long to leave it. Declare plainly that you seek a better country, that is, an heavenly: And while God permits your time to *last*; do not permit it to be *lost*. May your pastors be able to give up their account of you with joy, and not with grief. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Permit us to address you as *Paul* did *Philemon*;" "Yea, Brethren, let us have joy of you in the Lord; refresh our bowels in the Lord." Pray for us, that God may bless us; and help us to pray for you. O may this blessed intercourse of supplications be free as the light, fervent as the heat, and regular as the revolving hours of a glorious summer's day.

We wish you, dear Friends, to *be*, and to *enjoy*, whatever is attainable and possible in the present life; that will make you honorable in the eyes of men now; and happy hereafter. God grant you health in your bodies, happiness in your families, success in your callings; and, above all, peace in your souls, and your assemblies; with a growing meetness for God and heaven. Go on, Sirs, with the most serious attention to your souls

souls affairs. Stand fast in the faith ; cleave close one to another ; love as brethren ; act like men of God ; like the *vallants of Israel*, or as an *army with banners*. Endeavour always to prove the truth of your doctrinal principles by the purity of your morals. Orthodoxy in sentiment, without integrity of conduct, will only tend to harden the gainsayer and discourage the enquirer. It was matter of the greatest joy to the Apostle *John*, that he found the *EleA Lady* and her children *swalking* in the truth ; and solemnly exhorts them to take care, that they might not lose the things they had wrought, but that they might receive a full reward. Fear not to suffer for the sake of Christ and truth. Christ bore our *curse*, said one, and therefore it is but reasonable that we should bear his *cross* : And indeed so it must be, if we are the true disciples and followers of Jesus. But we take our leave, for this year, with the warmest assurances of our affectionate regards for your best interests.—May God be gracious ; and Jesus precious to every soul among you ! May you glorify God in your temper, character, life and death ; and finally, may we all join, in the Lord's own time, the general assembly and Church of the first-born ; and with them sing *Hallelujahs* to God and the Lamb for ever and ever : So pray, and so conclude your affectionate Brethren in Jesus our Lord.

Signed in behalf of the Messengers by the Moderator,

James Turner.

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B R E V I A T E S.

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MOST of the Messengers arrived in safety on Tuesday evening, and after some time spent in prayer, Brother TURNER was chosen MODERATOR; the Letters from the several Churches were read, minutes taken, and their contents considered. In general, the Churches are in peace, and we hope have the truth amongst them, and love it. Several Letters make mention of the state of public affairs, and recommended fasting and prayer, as highly necessary at the present awful crisis, that God may be pleased in mercy to remember us, reform and bless us. This opportunity was closed by prayer.

We met again next morning for prayer. One of the Brethren produced the Circular Letter, which was read and approved. At ten o'clock the public service was introduced by singing and prayer by Brother HILLER; Brother BEDDOME preached from 1 Kings xviii. 17. *Art thou be that troubleth Israel?* and Brother HALL concluded the morning service.—At two o'clock the service was introduced as before; Brother SUTCLIFF prayed; Brother ASH preached from 2 Cor. iv. 3. *And if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*; and Brother EVANS concluded by prayer.—We met again in the evening, six o'clock; Brother LAWRENCE BUTTERWORTH prayed, Brother DORE preached from Luke viii. 18. *Take heed therefore how you bear*; and closed the solemnities of the Association by prayer.

The present STATE of the CHURCHES.

Added this year—Baptised	55						
Lost by	<table> <tr> <td>Death</td><td>21</td></tr> <tr> <td>Dismission</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td>Exclusion</td><td>6</td></tr> </table>	Death	21	Dismission	1	Exclusion	6
Death	21						
Dismission	1						
Exclusion	6						
	— 28						
Total Increase	27						

Agreed; to keep a Day of Fasting and Prayer between the Hay and Corn Harvests, on such days as may be most convenient to the Churches.

The Association next year to be at *Cirencester*; our Brethren POYNTING and L. BUTTERWORTH to preach; in case of failure, Brother ASH.

Put up at the R A M.

THE END.

